

Fall 2002. First-Year Seminar. Contemporary American Film

Steven Dillon

Pettiegrew 307

Office Hours: T 8:30-10 W 9:30-10 TH 2:30-3:30 and by appointment

Required Text: David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, Film Art: An Introduction

Schedule of Assignments:

W September 4 Introduction

11 Steven Spielberg, Jurassic Park, Saving Private Ryan
Bordwell, Film Art, Chapter One, pp. 2-37 **HW1**

18 Spielberg, Schindler's List, A.I.
Bordwell, Film Art, Chapter Two, pp. 39-58 **HW2**

25 Kathryn Bigelow, Strange Days; Wachowski Bros., The Matrix
Bordwell, Chapter Three, pp. 59-92 **HW3**

October 2 Darren Aronofsky, B, Requiem for a Dream
Bordwell, Chapter Four, pp. 94-109 **HW4**

9 Marc Levin, Slam; Karyn Kusama, Girlfight
Bordwell, Chapter Five, pp. 110-154 **HW5**

Fall Recess

23 Todd Solondz, Welcome to the Dollhouse; Happiness
Bordwell, Chapter Six, pp. 156-192 **HW6**

30 Spike Lee, Do the Right Thing; Get on the Bus
Bordwell, Chapter Seven, pp. 193-248 **HW7**

November 6 Jim Jarmusch, Dead Man; Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai
Bordwell, Chapter Eight, pp. 249-290 **HW8**

13 John Singleton, Boyz N the Hood; Baby Boy
Bordwell, Chapter Nine, pp. 291-326 **HW9**

20 David Lynch, Lost Highway; Mulholland Drive
Bordwell, Chapter Ten, pp. 327-350 **HW10**

Thanksgiving Recess

December 4 Spike Jonz, Being John Malkevich
HW11

December 9 10-page final paper (analytical interpretation + research) due by 5 p.m.

Grading: 11 Homeworks 75%. Final paper 25%. There is no midterm or final exam. Useful contributions to class discussion will certainly be taken into account in the final summing up. I want very much to see you in class each time and I'd like to see all the homeworks handed in. To miss a class, in this case, is to miss a whole week's worth of classes. Unexcused absences will detract from your overall grade; no late homework will be accepted without a Dean's excuse.

Course Description: This course provides an introduction to film studies, by using contemporary American film as our focus. Our study also takes place in the context of a first-year seminar, so there will be frequent short writing assignments. In terms of content, the course begins with some of the more popular films of the 90s, exemplified here especially by Steven Spielberg. Shortly thereafter we will move into films taken to be more critically interesting, produced by "independent" film-makers not so obviously aligned with Hollywood. As we discuss each film, we will come to learn various methods and approaches to talking about film (structure, set design, editing, soundtrack, acting). It is hoped that by the end of the course you will want to continue your investigation of film-beyond-the-mall. You will be able to make the most of this course by working carefully with the films assigned, and if you have a chance, to watch other films as well. The more movies you watch, the more you'll come to understand film language. I will often mention other film titles in class, and you'll come across dozens of key films in the Bordwell textbook. Every once and a while, have a look at one of these other movies—a silent film, a movie from classic Hollywood, a foreign art movie, or another work of contemporary American independent film.

Logistics: You need to watch the movies, at your convenience, in the week between Wednesday classes. All of the movies will be on reserve in the audio/video department in Ladd library. Don't wait until the last minute!—because otherwise someone else might have the video. We need to share the videos, of course, so when you are done, please return the video to the desk where you checked it out. Each week we'll officially watch 2 movies, write a page (or so) response to each movie, and read a chunk of Bordwell textbook. I may not ask you officially to respond to Bordwell, but you'll be a lot smarter about what to do with movies if you keep up in your reading.